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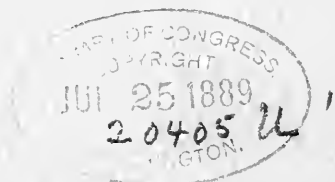
RAYS from
the
Christmas Star

Savage



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33
BY
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Coming.

WHEN disease and want and sorrow
Are beneath thy gladsome feet,
When are broken all earth's shackles,
When as one all nations meet,

When the wide earth is a garden,
When love driveth out all hate,
When earth's once terrific forces
Like trained servants on thee wait,—

*Then the God who through the ages
Did thy toilsome progress lead,
He who was and is and shall be,
Will have come in very deed!*

THE HUMAN CHRISTMAS.

FAR up the ages, on the dim borders of the primeval world, we can discern the outlines of the gathering peoples, can hear the distant strains of their festive music and the far-echoed shouts of their joy. Their sun-god is born in the darkest day of winter, and is coming to bring life and light and gladness again. The dream of Immanuel—"God with us"—has never been far from the hearts of men. Whether it took the shape of a Greek theophany, the Messianic vision of the Jew, the glad Saturnalia of the Roman, the Egyptian incarnation of Horus, the Indian myth of Vishnu, or the Christian myth of the manger child, at heart it is the wide world's one hope, one dream, one grand reality. In whatever dress the loving imagination or the crude fancy of man may clothe it, the attempt to express an eternal truth is plain. Is it the dream of Eden that man was once with God and God with man? Is it the crude sun-worshipper's fancy that the bright god is coming with warmth and food to the cold and needy earth? Is it the Jewish hope that some day God will appear for human deliverance? Is it the Indian and Egyptian secret that God and man are of kin, and one may wear the likeness of the other? Is it the Christian myth that God did once have a human mother, and stooped thus to our low estate? In all these Protean shapes, man has always struggled to utter what he has felt to be an infinite truth. And though *all* the utterances be *false in form*, and so fail adequately to express the inexpressible, yet *the truth remains*.

How?

HOW shall come thy kingdom holy,
In which all the earth is blest,
That shall lift on high the lowly,
And to weary souls give rest?
Not with trumpet call of legions
Bursting through the upper sky,
Waking earth through all its regions
With their heaven-descending cry;

Not with dash or sudden sally,
Swooping down with rushing wing,
But as, creeping up a valley,
Come the grasses in the spring:
First one blade and then another,
Still advancing are they seen,
Rank on rank, each by its brother,
Till each inch of ground is green.

Through the weary days of sowing,
Burning sun and drenching shower,
Day by day, so slowly growing,
Comes the waited harvest hour.
So the kingdom cometh ever,
Though it seem so far away:
Each bright thought and true endeavor
Hastens on the blessed day.

Earth's Echo of the Christmas Song.

“THE world is my country, and to do good is my religion.”

The name of the man who gave utterance to these words has for a hundred years been bespotted with obloquy, for the reason that he rejected certain dogmas that were considered essential parts of the popular religion. And yet I know no words better fitted to be the earth's response to the Christmas song of the angels than are these. In this grand antiphony, when we hear the angels singing, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men,” what answer can the earth give to that song more beautiful than, “The world is my country, and to do good is my religion”? For, when this latter sentiment has been wrought out in the lives of individuals and of nations, the prophecy of the angel-song will have been accomplished; for this is only another way of giving utterance to the divine sentiment of “Good will.” Good will! This is the finest, highest, last outcome of all civilization. To bring about a condition in which good will shall be universal is the one aim and end of all this old earth's endeavor.

The Kingdom Here.

SINCE God is love, and loving
Is heaven, love keeps the gate ;
And they who know love's secret
Need for no future wait.

In spite, then, of earth's sorrow,
In spite of all its sin,
The kingdom is before you :
Arise, and enter in !

The Dream of Peace.

AND it is a most beautiful dream, is it not, this which pictures the whole round world at peace? Think, for a moment, what it would mean! All the armies disbanded; all the forts dismantled and left to decay; all the ships-of-war rotting at the wharves or else turned into messengers of commerce. Think of the great cities, populous with men and women, with children playing freely and happily in the streets, great tides of commerce flowing from city to city and nation to nation, ships on every sea, but not a gun on any one of them, ships crossing to carry the products of peaceful industry from where there was a surplus to where there might be a need, the sailors lading or unlading these ships, singing and contented at their work. Then those lovely country pictures which are embalmed in all the poetry of the world,—cattle feeding at peace in their pastures, browsing along the brooks or on the edges of the quiet rivers, reflecting themselves in the still water, the flocks of sheep upon the hillsides hardly needing the guardianship either of dog or shepherd, the cottages of the farmers covered with vines, where peace and content abound, because there is plenty, and no fear of the future; all men and all women in all nations and under all skies engaged in the quiet and happy pursuits of peaceful life, trying to produce all they can for their own needs, glad to exchange with their neighbors, and calling all men neighbors, though the diameter of the world be between them. Is it not a lovely picture? Is it not something to kindle the poet's imagination? Is it not something to fire the heart of the patriot? Is it not something to rouse the enthusiasm and the inspiration of the world's leaders, and is it not a credit to hearts in all ages that they have at least desired a world like this?

Prophecy.

ALAS! the world has dreamed this dream,
And only now the sun
Begins to touch the eastern hills,—
The dawning is begun.

The wondrous boy is ours once more;
No god, but just a boy,—
A boy, a youth, a man, whose love
Foretells the future's joy.

For he, the blossom fair, the fruit
Sprung from our human tree,
Becometh thus a prophecy
Of what the world shall be.

For he was human; and, since man
Such fruit for once could bear,
The future's harvest-field shall see
Such fruitage everywhere.

Man Can Bring the Kingdom.

THE kingdom of God on earth! What do we need to do to bring it about? We need to abolish disease as far as possible. That is a problem that can be solved. Man can solve it. He is going to solve it. We need to abolish vice and crime. Men will learn some day, as they get wiser, that their happiness and welfare are involved in living clean, noble, true lives; and, when they learn that, they will struggle on toward the realization of it. So this is a problem capable of solution. It is nothing to sit down before in despair; because it can be done. We need to abolish war and the everlasting rivalry and bloodshed between nations, as between individuals. And this can be done. I know not when. I only know the world has made progress toward it, and is progressing toward it still. I only know that this mighty force, that reaches out toward the better, is not yet spent. I believe that the kingdom of God will come, not suddenly, ~~not revealed~~ from heaven, but slowly evolved from earth, as you and I begin, just where we stand, to fulfil, in all nobility and manliness, the commonplace relations of our lives, making a kingdom of God where we are, that shall spread and grow until our personal spheres touch and coalesce with the personal spheres of others; and so, by contagion, it spreads over the whole round world.

Hope in the Children.

THE children are a prophecy
Of what shall one day be,
When we a fairer land have gained
Beyond to-day's rough sea.

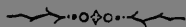
We weary, tugging at the oars :
Our hearts grow sick and faint ;
Their younger arms the ship shall guide,
Their shouts drown our complaint.

We sigh, " The land is far away,"
And give the struggle o'er :
They'll bring the vessel into port,
And leap upon the shore.

The Christmas hope to us is dim,
And God seems far away :
Our children's songs shall usher in
The endless Christmas day.

JOY NOT SELFISH.

WE must depend on others for our joy. If we have beauty, it is nothing except as some one appreciates it. If we write a book, it is all vain, except as some one reads and cares for it. If we paint a picture or sing a song, it is for the eyes or ears of others. And the world is gradually learning the great lesson, the secret of civilization, that no one can be happy alone. It can only be as one perfect unit of a perfect society. Humanity is one body; and, while the foot suffers, the head cannot be at rest.



Universal Wonder.

MEN speak of the wonder of the virgin birth. The wonder of any birth is as deep, as mysterious, as unfathomable. Wherever you stand, whichever way you turn, the infinite mystery of what we call divine when we talk religion, of what we call evolutionary force when we talk science, faces us.

Love the Real Kingdom.

MEN thought, on wings of angels
As time drew near its end,
This vision out of heaven
Should to the earth descend.

But God, through human working,
Through blood and toil and tears,
The blessed age is leading
Up the ascent of years.

Yet none the less it cometh !
This earth is as divine
As any orb that seemeth
In highest heaven to shine.

Nor is there aught diviner
In any realm above
Than tender human pity,
And gentle human love.

And 'tis this love so human
That shall the sceptre hold —
God's son, God's true vicegerent
To rule the age of gold.

He will not come for dreaming,
This king we wait in vain.
When in your heart, in my heart,
He findeth room to reign,—

Then shall we God's blest kingdom,
Man's kingdom, enter in,
Then vanquished is earth's sorrow,
Then vanished is earth's sin.

So comes the Christmas vision
From cloudland to the real.
So cometh, and so only,
The far, the nigh ideal!

GROWTH OF CHRISTMAS.

THE observance of this day has enormously expanded within the last forty years. It did not originate with Christianity; and not one of its special features is peculiarly Christian. The evergreens and the flowers, the gift-giving and the general mirth, are all an inheritance from pagan peoples. It was the birthday of the sun-god ages before Jesus was lifted to the vacant pagan throne. Indeed, it was not celebrated by Christians at all for centuries. In the hands of the Roman and Anglican Churches, during the sixteenth century, it had become associated with so much that was rude, boisterous, immoral, and superstitious that the Reformation repudiated it, and tried to wipe it out of existence. But, being so human, it was rightly dear to the human heart. Its marvellous literary expansion is doubtless due, more than to anyone else, to Charles Dickens. As it has grown more and more in popular favor, it has come to stand for all the sweet amenities of human life. It is the time when, however busy or forgetful we may be the rest of the year, we find time for the remembrance of all our friends. It is the day of the heart, when all its warm, sweet impulses should flow forth simply and unrestrained.

THE FLITTING VISION.

|N old crusading days, a childhood band,
| Rushed blindly on to seek the sacred land,
And wrest from grasp of pagan infidel
The Tomb of Christ. 'Tis said that it befell,
Whenever some new town arose in sight,
They cried out, eager in their glad delight —
Trusting no more of toil remained for them —
“ Now are we there? *Is this Jerusalem?* ”
But like a fire besieged by wind and rain,
Though almost quenched, their courage flamed again.
Still on they marched; and every distant spire
Kindled fresh hope, and fed their strong desire.
And, though the city yet was far away,
Each new town lured them onward day by day.

Date of Christmas.

NOW, nobody knows at what time of year Jesus was born. And it was not until some time in the fourth century that the present date for the Christmas festival was fixed upon. Chrysostom tells us it was purposely fixed upon the date of the Roman Saturnalia. Whatever may have been the conscious purpose of the Church, it is easy to see that this was no mere accident. The Saturnalia meant "God with us"; and Christmas means the same, though the mythical forms that tell the story be ever so divergent. It was only natural, then, that the Roman festival, instead of being torn up by the roots, should be grafted on the Norseman's Ygdrasil or world tree, and that both should blossom out into the lights, and be heavy with the fruit of friendship's heavy gifts. The Christmas tree then means the human love-gifts that grow out of the root of human faith in the fatherhood of God. No wonder, then, that the festival is permanent, that it grows in favor, that it overruns the borders of all sects and creeds; for its tap-root is in the human heart, and its branches will yet hold out their bending burdens of love for all the earth to gather.

ONLY MAKERS OF HEAVEN FIND HEAVEN.

GOD crowns each man, each woman
A king, a queen, and cries :

“ Look neither back nor forward,
Nor gaze upon the skies.

“ Look round you and beneath you,
And there your kingdom see ;
In loving and in helping
Your paradise shall be !

“ Not in the heaven you dream of
Is truest happiness :
You are as God when like him
Some needy life you bless.

“ Create, then, truth and beauty ;
And beauty, truth, shall be
The very world you live in,
The life of all you see.

“ For still the heart is maker
Of its own world ; and, when
The kingdom is within you,
’Twill be without you then.”

Thus speaks the God within us.
Let old-time dreams remain ;
Nor let us for the future
Our longings waste in vain.

We want no lazy heaven :
When love can find its mate,
Two out of happy labor
A heaven can create.

Tears cleanse the eyes, and struggle
But maketh brave hearts strong ;
And over death triumphant
Hope sings her victor song.

So, while there’s want and sorrow,
Let us our heaven seek
In making burdens lighter
And lifting up the weak.

Man Can Make Heaven.

SCIENCE has done much, is doing more, in developing the highest conception of the universe, the oneness of God, the oneness of human origin, the oneness of human nature, the oneness of human destiny. But the past has developed largely under the influence of what Mr. Darwin calls the power of natural selection. The best things, by the very fact that they were the best, the mightiest, have gradually come to the front; and now the time has come when we can help on this process by what should be called human selection. The educated people of the world can study the laws of human association, of human growth; they can remove obstacles and help on the cultivation of those things on which the peace and prosperity of the world depend. So that the thing which we should do is to seek to advance human knowledge, make it universal; so that all people, instead of being obstructionists to the world's advance, may co-operate together in achieving the common and magnificent destiny that lies before us, if we are wise enough to reach out our hands and take it.

THE LEADING IDEAL.

THIS is the Christmas hope. A son is born,
Who, like a star upon the front of morn,
Is herald of the day that is divine,—
The day that with the Perfect Light shall shine.
But still Messiah dies, and hope delays.
Still mankind stumbles over darksome ways.
Disease and sorrow and despair abide,
As though no Son of God had lived or died.
The way is weary; and the city bright
We seek so long is still beyond our sight.
Once more the Christmas bells ring on the air,
And with their music drive away despair.
The hope-crowned Christ-child ever comes anew;
One day the mother's dream shall all come true.
New heavens, new earth! Although they long delay,
'Tis God who lures us on, and leads the way.
And each illusion, like a veil withdrawn,
Fades like a cloud but to reveal the dawn.
A morn shall surely come when Christmas bells shall ring,
Proclaiming evil dead, and man the glad earth's king.

LIGHT ON THE HILLS.

JESUS and souls like him help us in another way. We see them towering above us like mountains that catch the first rays of light, while we are in the dark. We are not tall enough to see, but we can believe that they see what they tell us they do. They can impart to us their faith, their trust; and it seems to me a purely rational thing. As a man on a mountain summit can see what I cannot in the valley, so, when some man that I recognize as having brain and heart and soul unspeakably above me assures me that he does see some great spiritual verity, I can, at any rate, feel that he probably does; and so I gain a grander faith in that which I was disposed to doubt and let slip from my grasp.

As when the valleys all in shadow lie,
And shadowy shapes of fear still haunt the night,
Some mountain peak reflects the coming light,
And waiting lips break forth with joyful cry

For gladness that at last the day is nigh,—
So when some soul, that towers afar, is bright,
The souls that sit in shadow, at the sight,
Grow sudden glad to know 'tis light on high!

And when these mountain-towering men can say,
“We see, though it be hidden from your eyes,”
We can believe in better things to be!
So though the shadows still obscure our way,
We see the light, reflected from the skies,
That crowns thy brows, O Man of Galilee!



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